Subconscious influence across cultures

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The purpose of this essay is to analyze the High-Low cultural framework of Edward T. Hall with respect the subconscious influencers outlined by Robert B. Cialdini to see when subconscious influencers are most effective if using a Cooperative Negotiation Strategy (CNS) context. "What we are talking about is *power* and its use".[1] Specifically at the subconscious level in order to better facilitate desired outcomes for those who understand how to wield it.

To provide context to my analysis, the definition of culture is, "Culture is the relatively stable set of inner values and beliefs generally held by groups of people in countries or regions and the noticeable impact those values and beliefs have on the peoples' outward behaviors and environment".[2] Additionally, "Culture is man's medium; there is not one aspect of human life that is not touched and altered by culture. This means personality, how people express themselves (including shows of emotion), the way they think, how they move, how problem are solved, how their cities are planned and laid out, how transportation systems function and are organized, as well as how economic and government systems are put together and function".[3]

But, why is it important to look at this subject through the lens outlined by Cialdini and Hall with respect to the CNS? "In a shrinking world with ever increasing competition, Americans are finding they need to know more and more about other cultures to both survive at home and abroad".[4] The same concept applies to military leadership. Mission requirements seem to continuously increase and the Air Force is a hierarchical organization that values 'name tags' and results.[5] This places unique challenges on its leadership, as long-term organization effectiveness and efficiency depend largely on relationships between people. To more effectively lead and solve tomorrow's challenges, USAF leadership must continuously strive to understand how to maximize the productivity by understanding and utilizing subconscious influences during the CNS problem solving process. "The key feature of Cooperative

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Negotiation Strategy is that negotiators purposefully seek opportunities to create new value from available resources while maintaining or developing a relationship".[6]

Understanding what drives others during the problem solving process provides the opportunity to mentally plan for interactions, which will make for more effective meetings and development of positive relationships. Hall developed a High or Low-context framework for categorizing cultures. (See Appendix 1) For generalization purposes the United States serves as low-context and everyone else as high-context. While generalizations do not always prove accurate, generalizations based on the insights of informed international cultural experts provide a fairly accurate picture of how people in a given country may.[7] Also, depending on which aspect of culture is considered, the United States may not be as low-context as another culture.

Hall believes understanding cultural differences allow human beings to interact more productively. Productive interaction is critical to success at all levels. In fact, when individuals fail to reach their full potential it decreases mission readiness. Hall states, "according to some of the most distinguished and thoughtful students of the mind, perhaps the most devastating and damaging thing that can happen to someone is to fail to fulfill his potential. A kind of gnawing emptiness, longing, frustration, and displaced anger overwhelms people when this occurs. Whether the anger turns inward on the self or outward toward others, dreadful destruction results".[8] The generalized framework Hall created is a valuable quick reference guide to help understand cultural influence on selected factors. Within this framework different aspects of high and low-context cultures are susceptible to the subconscious influencers as outlined by Cialdini.

Cialdini identifies the weapons of influence as **Reciprocation**, **Commitment and Consistency**, **Social Proof**, **Liking**, **Authority** and **Scarcity**.[9] Why do we need these weapons

of influence? Learning to utilize what influences subconscious thought allows you to produce results in a timely and effective manner. Those understanding these influences, "go from social encounter to social encounter, requesting others to comply with their wishes; their frequency of success is dazzling. The secret of their effectiveness lies in the way that they structure their requests, the way that they arm themselves with one or another of the weapons of influence that exist in the social environment".[10]

The **rule of reciprocation** "says that we should try to repay, in kind, what another person has provided us. If a woman does us a favor, we should do her one in return".[11]   In hierarchical organizations, it's your duty to accomplish an assigned task. With this in mind, utilizing the reciprocation rule is key to increasing acceptance of newly assigned duties. Seemingly very simple but effective techniques include going to another person's duty location as opposed to asking them to meet in your conference room, treating the team to sodas and working lunches, and most importantly telling others "Thank you" for their efforts.

While these techniques seem obvious, they demonstrate the beauty of understanding how to impact subconscious thought. In addition to just offering thanks, leadership should identify specific actions accomplished by working group members and notify senior leaders in their supervisory chain of their exceptional effort.   Also, simply communicating the understanding of increases in workload and its impact on the organization generates a mutual bond between workers. "One of the reasons reciprocation can be used so effectively as a device for gaining another's compliance is its power. The rule possesses awesome strength, often producing a yes response to a request that, except for an existing feeling of indebtedness, would have surely been refused".[12] Within a hierarchical organization, the opportunity for the members within an organization to refuse a task doesn't really exist; however, creating feelings of indebtedness

definitely provides motivation for cooperation. In any organization, not everyone always likes each other, but the feeling of indebtedness will overcome this dislike and greatly increase the chances for cooperation.[13] For example, while establishing initial working groups a leader may place 'uninvited debts' on the members through small actions. These uninvited debts subconsciously establish an obligation to reciprocate. This subconscious obligation exists even when making concessions. Since it's difficult to deny an act of kindness, the initiator establishes indebtness, taking choice from others in a very subtle manner. The rule of reciprocity is a very subtle but influential tool. It can overcome other influences and lead to positive contributions from team members. Members from both high and low-context societies are susceptible to the rule of reciprocity.

In a high-context society, "once a relationship is formed, loyalty is never questioned".[14] Also, "people raised in high-context systems expect more of others than do participants in low-context systems".[15] Additionally, high-context cultures view 'time' as a gift to give and be shared. They identify more with families or tribes than nation-states. Becoming part of the family establishes an obligation which will in turn force them to share 'time' and follow through on commitments made to 'family' members. Hall states, "The degree to which one is committed to complete an action chain is one of the many ways in which cultures vary. In general, high-context culture, because of the high involvement people have with each other and their highly interricular, cohesive nature, tend toward high commitment to complete action chains, all of which makes for great caution and often reluctance to begin something, particularly in fields or relationships that are not well known".[16] This establishes the rule of reciprocity as an invaluable tool to bring a member from high-context society into a relationship. Once entered into it by accepting a gift the very act of accepting it opens a door to further dealings.

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As compared to high-context societies, members from low-context society are less likely to complete an action once started unless properly motivated. They value 'time' as a resource to use. They value getting the job done over the relationship. Therefore, it catches members completely off guard if the rule of reciprocity is used. It creates a feeling of indebtness and easily opens the door to future endeavors.

The **rule of commitment and consistency** is "our desire to be (and appear) consistent with what we have already done".[17] "Today, man is increasingly placed in positions in which culture can no longer be depended upon to produce reliable readings of what other people are going to do next. He is constantly in the position of interacting with strangers".[18] "Japanese are very consistent once you get to know them, but unpredictable if you don't. Admittedly, it is difficult for hard-nosed American businessmen to deal with indirection and accustom themselves to the fact that in Japan verbal agreements are binding and much preferred to the ironbound written contract of the West, which can always be nullified or abrogated away".[19] High-context culture view Americans as not being trustworthy because of our reliance on litigation. Everything has to be in contract. What we say doesn't really matter. "Take the matter of not trusting people, so that everything has to be on the dotted line".[20] A foundation of American culture is the rule of law. High and low-context culture is at complete odds in this domain. However, if American's expect to effectively function in high-context societies, we must adjust. After all, we usually do not enjoy home field advantage for most of our interactions. "Man is interacting with strangers, because his extensions have both widened his range and caused his world to shrink. It is therefore necessary for man to transcend his own culture, and this can only be done by making explicit the rules by which it operates".[21] Some senior leaders understand this, as example of the following story.

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"At one point General Colin Powell—who was then chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff—came out to look over the operation. During my brief with him, I showed him a nice chart we had carefully produced to show command relationships. It had all kinds of authority that appeared more direct and neat than the actual situation. General Powell, a very astute human being, obviously saw that the reality wasn't as clean as the chart. He looked at me and laughed: "What are the command relationships here? Is it OPCON? TACON? "

"I shuffled my feet, and said, "Sir, its HANDCON. We're doing much of this on a handshake." [22] This example highlights how for a low-context culture to influence a high-context culture consistency is critical to receiving commitment within interpersonal relationships. American's must be good for their word in order to influence others while still developing positive relationships.

In low-context society, receiving commitment from individuals assigned to work with you when no formal supervisory authority exists is challenging. To overcome this challenge, it is imperative to create an environment of team problem solving or CNS. Team members do not feel as if they receive a tasking when the solution to the problem seemingly came from them, which in turn committed them to task. Cialdini states, "There are certain conditions that should be present for a commitment to be effective in this way: they should be active, public, effortful, and freely chosen".[23] For example, before public working groups gather, leadership should meet individually with specific team members to work through their taskings prior to the larger meeting. Then, during the larger working group when their issue was brought up in public the subject matter expert will present a proposed solution with a plan and expected deadline. This public commitment creates not only buy-in but a commitment. They received public credit for the idea, solution, and successfully completed task. Working to create the image of a team of

proactive problem solvers one person at a time does just that: it creates a team of proactive problem solvers committed to their individual and team success. This environment wins the hearts and minds of the working group members, meaning they all showed up ready to provide solutions. Military members are especially susceptible to individuals who employ the commitment tactic. The "I can do it" attitude is fostered from the beginning of an officer's career. The rule of commitment and consistency is not only a simple but is a powerful motivator in the problem solving process.

The **rule of social proof** "states that one important means that people use to decide what to believe or how to act in a situation is to look at what other people are believing or doing there".[24] The rule of social proof, gaining individual buy-in to an idea or concept is vitally important when floating a 'new' idea or process. As soon as the group feels buy-in exists due to "individuals proactively providing unique solutions in front of the group", the synergy takes hold and organizations flourish. However, ideas are communicated differently in high-context cultures. For example, in high-context cultures communication is in context. Stories are used to transfer intent. In low-context situations we communicate with facts and precise language. In both, one uses a screen to allow some information to come through while filtering out other information.[25] In my opinion members from both high and low-context societies are susceptible to the rule of social proof. However, establishing a relationship is a prerequisite when applying it to high-context cultures.

In a less technical and globalized world, communication between individuals was personal. Interaction usually only occurred between people who frequently interacted and therefore the intent of communication was probably more clearly conveyed. However, in current times communication is not always personal and the amount of communication transferred can

be overwhelming. Understanding how communication is received will help understand how to transfer it for an intended message. Especially if a leader wants to create "social proof". "A high-context communication or message is one which most of the information is either physical context or internalized in the person, while very little is in the coded, explicit, transmitted part of the message. A low-context communication is just the opposite; i.e. the mass of the information is vested in the explicit code"[26] Additionally, "high-context transactions feature preprogrammed information that is in the receiver and in the setting, with only minimal information in the transmitted message. Low-context transactions are the reverse. Most of the information must be in the transmitted message in order to make up for what is missing in the context. In general, high-context communication, in contrast to low-context is economical, fast, efficient, and satisfying; however, time must be devoted to programming. If this programming does not take place, the communication is incomplete".[27] In order for members from low-context society to actively communicate with members from high-context society, time must be invested in developing an understanding through mutual encounters and communications.

Using the rule of social proof is more difficult on members from high-context society due the fact that they'll take in the whole situation, the communication must be well developed and they will inherently resist to being rushed with a group due to their concept of time. Americans on the other hand will respond to short burst of information and more likely go with the group more quickly. This rule requires an investment of time and relationship building when interacting with high-context cultures.

The **rule of liking** says "people prefer to say yes to individuals they know and like".[28] . Also, individuals will typically associate positive news with those who bear it. In a hierarchical organization a technique that builds on this rule while building long-term relationships needed

for CNS is to take individuals out for working lunches. Discussing similar interests and backgrounds before working through a problem provides opportunity to get the most out of the work day while building relationships and changing to a non-office environment. Cialdini identifies this as the "luncheon technique." He "found that his subject became fonder of the people and things they experienced while they were eating".[29] As trivial as this technique appears, it works. "We are phenomenal sucker for flattery"[30]and "we tend, as a rule, to believe praise and to like those who provide it".[31] Due to the amount of work required in modern organizations, heartfelt expressions of gratitude that are genuine will contribute to long-term organizational success. In American hierarchical organizations, whose members typically come from a low-context culture and are also "A" type personalities, this does not happen often enough. Expressions of gratitude catch people off guard. However, it's important to not provide a generalized expression of thanks. A sincere expression of gratitude clearly identifying a specific action and outcome creates a commitment towards the organization and individuals leading it.

For members of high-context society the rule of liking will work if you also know how to behave when developing it. For example, "It is very seldom in Japan that someone will correct you or explain things to you. You are supposed to know, and they get quite upset when you don't. Also, Japanese loyalties are rather concrete and circumscribed".[32] Also, for high-context society the extra effort of saving face matters. It's more than liking. It's a matter of respect and honor. Members from low-context society should know what questions to ask in order to keep them out of a situation that makes them look bad or brings them shame. This is called 'saving face'. Allowing them to 'save face' creates likeability and develops lasting relationships which will lead to more productive problem solving.

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The **rule of authority** states that individuals are conditioned to automatically comply with requests of an authority.[33] In a hierarchical organization this is both a strength and weakness when solving problems. For example, in a productive organization leadership may not want members to automatically comply with the first proposed solution. In America status is externalized, "America is a credentialed society".[34] Cialdini states, "When reacting to authority in an automatic fashion, there is a tendency to do so in response to the mere symbols of authority rather that to its substance."[35]

The letters at the end of our name, the size of our office or the layers of bureaucracy one has to go through to reach someone shows importance.   For example, a duty title provides an acknowledged level of responsibility proving justification to deal directly with members of higher rank at an equivalent positional level to accomplish the mission. As an example, "in England, status is externalized; it has its manifestations and markers—the upper-class received English accent, for example".[36] "In the United States, the person who gets moved is often the lowest-ranking individual. This principal applies to all organizations, including the Army. Whether you can be moved or not is a function of our status, your performance, and your value to the organization. To move someone without telling him is almost worse than an insult, because it means he is below the point at which feelings matter."[37] External indicators and the use of them will have more influence on low-context cultures than it will have on high-context cultures. For example, if moving the office of someone from a high-context society, they will see it as a sign of familiarity and that you consider them part of your extended family. So the move will be for the larger good. In high-context societies, "one has to be an insider or else have "friend" who can make things happen".[38]

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"According to **the scarcity principle**, people assign more value to opportunities when they are less available."[39] As competition for the resources of time and manpower continue to increase in hierarchical organizations, compliance techniques such as "deadline" tactics will become more prevalent.[40] Due to the limited amount of time and manpower available, members may to come in and work on weekends to accomplish extremely short notice taskings. As Air Force leadership learns to utilize subconscious influences to create teams centered on productive problem solving, extremely short taskings will become less prevalent, not common practice. Individuals will engage prior to the tasking, working out any issues in an integrative manner and then formal tasking will be for official record only. This is critical based on our current cultural understanding of 'Time'.

With respect to 'Time', "It is frequently the most obvious and taken for granted and therefore the least studied aspects of culture that influence behavior in the deepest and most subtle ways".[41] High-context cultures value time as a gift to share and low-context cultures value time as a resource to use…it shows efficiency.[42] As part of the context of time, high-context cultures approach tasks from the perspective of "things will get done when they get done"[43] and low-context from "things will get done, ON TIME".[44] This concept of time and work reflects how American's go to war. General Zinni states, "It soon hit me that I was fighting with a unit who saw this war in the long term. They were not impatient, like Americans, to end this war *right now*. Their tour wasn't for a year, the way it was for our troops. No one was promising to "have them home by Christmas," as our political leaders were ridiculously vowing. They didn't bounce in and out as we did, thinking: "It's my duty to make a difference and bring this to a decisive battle right now." For Americans, refusing battle was out of the question. But so was looking at the war in a longer term context, as they—and the enemy—did".[45]

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Japanese approach time in a different respect: "many of the traits that U.S. trade negotiators have found most galling in their Japanese counterparts—for instance, a snail-like pace and an obsessive attention to detail—are products of, not aberrations from, an underlying cautiousness and defensiveness".[46]

As technology continues to improve and the amount of information processed by humans continues to increase, information shortcuts will become more valuable to the individuals working to solve problems. Understanding the influences contributing to decision shortcuts will aide leaders in developing teams who utilize CNS in the decision making process. The utility of studying the influences on decision making is that people are essential to an organization. The people making up organizations or teams may come from different cultures. These team members will approach 'values' in very different ways. The different approaches spark misunderstandings that may result in conflict. However, I believe learning to combine cultural understanding and the understanding of subconscious influences with the CNS will create proactive teams of problem solvers geared toward long-term success. "The USAF identifies negotiating as one of its desired Institutional Leadership Competencies (ILC)."[47] However, just as Cooperative Negotiation Strategies are very seldom studied by leaders in hierarchical organizations, social influence techniques are also rarely discussed. I believe understanding how to positively influence members of a team to cooperatively problem solve is absolutely essential to future Air Force success.

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[1] Hall, "Beyond Culture" 1989, 1

[2] Peterson, "Cultural Intelligence", 2004, 17

[3] Hall, "Beyond Culture", 1989, 16-17

[4] Peterson, "Cultural Intelligence", 2004, 15

[5] Goodwin, Deborah (Author of the Military and Negotiation), in discussion with the author, approx 28 Oct 2009.

[6] "*Warrior/Negotiator: Not an Oxymoron, but Necessity*" (working paper, unknown author), 30.

[7] Peterson, "Cultural Intelligence", 2004, 27

[8] Hall, "Beyond Culture", 1989, 5

[9] Cialdini, "Influence, Science and Practice", 2009, v-vii

[10] Cialdini, "Influence, Science and Practice", 2009, 11

[11] Cialdini, "Influence, Science and Practice", 2009, 19

[12] Cialdini, "Influence, Science and Practice", 2009, 23

[13] Cialdini, "Influence, Science and Practice", 2009, 23

[14] Hall, "Beyond Culture", 1989, 113

[15] Hall, " Beyond Culture", 1989, 113

[16] Hall, " Beyond Culture", 1989, 147

[17] Cialdini, "Influence, Science and Practice", 2009, 52

[18] Hall, " Beyond Culture", 1989, 44

[19] Hall, " Beyond Culture", 1989, 45

[20] Hall, " Beyond Culture", 1989, 45

[21] Hall, " Beyond Culture", 1989, 54

[22] Zinni & Koltz, "The Battle For Peace, A Frontline Vision of America's Power & Purpose", 2006, 75

[23] Cialdini, "Influence, Science and Practice", 2009, 66

[24] Cialdini, "Influence, Science and Practice", 2009, 138

[25] Hall, " Beyond Culture", 1989, 86

[26] Hall, " Beyond Culture", 1989, 91

[27] Hall, " Beyond Culture", 1989, 101

[28] Cialdini, "Influence, Science and Practice", 2009, 172

[29] Cialdini, "Influence, Science and Practice", 2009, 164

[30] Cialdini, "Influence, Science and Practice", 2009, 151

[31] Cialdini, "Influence, Science and Practice", 2009, 151

[32] Hall, " Beyond Culture", 1989, 112

[33] Cialdini, "Influence, Science and Practice", 2009, 194

[34] ACSC, Negotiations Elective, in person conversation with Dr. Eisen

[35] Cialdini, "Influence, Science and Practice", 2009, 196

[36] Hall, " Beyond Culture", 1989, 62

[37] Hall, " Beyond Culture", 1989, 61

[38] Hall, " Beyond Culture", 1989, 22

[39] Cialdini, "Influence, Science and Practice", 2009, 225

[40] Cialdini, "Influence, Science and Practice", 2009, 225

[41] Hall, " Beyond Culture", 1989, 17

[42] ACSC, Negotiations class slide, See appendix 1

[43] ACSC, Negotiations class slide, See appendix 1

[44] ACSC, Negotiations class slide, See appendix 1

[45] Zinni & Koltz, "The Battle For Peace, A Frontline Vision of America's Power & Purpose", 2006, 18

[46] Blaker and Giarra and Vogel, "Case Studies in Japanese Negotiating Behavior". 2002, 6

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[47]"*Warrior/Negotiator: Not an Oxymoron, but Necessity*" (working paper, unknown author), 6.

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